

Ernest Hemingway House

The **Ernest Hemingway House** was the residence of author Ernest Hemingway in Key West, Florida, United States. It is at 907 Whitehead Street, across from the Key West Lighthouse, close to the southern coast of the island. On November 24, 1968, it was designated a U.S. National Historic Landmark.^[3]

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History

This was Hemingway's home from 1931 to 1939, although he retained title to the home until he died.^[1] It is a private, for-profit tourist attraction now populated by six- and seven-toed cats that are descendants of Hemingway's cats. The author's second son, Patrick, who lived in the house, stated in a 1994 interview in *The Miami Herald's* "Tropic" that his father had peacocks in Key West and that he owned cats in Cuba. However, a photo on display at the Hemingway Home in Key West shows Patrick and his younger brother, Gregory, in front of the Cuban water jar near the swimming pool, and Gregory is holding a white cat named Snow White. In addition to the photo showing Patrick and Gregory with Snow White, Hemingway's wife at the time, Pauline, wrote the following in a January 22, 1937, letter to Hemingway (who was staying at the Barclay's Hotel in New York City):

Snow White has become his (G's) fox fur that walks. Esther is having the same old cat looing troubles, with discussed alternatives of 1) getting little female, 2) letting him out and NOT worrying, which turns into letting him out and worrying, 3) castrating, 4) putting ad in paper asking for return of brown, blue-eyed cat with reward.

Ernest Hemingway House	
 <div>U.S. National Register of Historic Places</div>	
 <div>U.S. National Historic Landmark</div>	
<div><div><div><div><div></div><div><div>Hemingway House in Key West, Florida</div></div></div></div><div></div></div></div>	
Location	907 Whitehead Street <div></div> Key West, Florida United States
Coordinates	24.55119°N 81.80062°W﻿ / ﻿
Built	1851 ^[1]
NRHP reference No.	68000023 (https://npgallery.nps.gov/AssetDetail/NRIS/68000023)
Significant dates	
Added to NRHP	November 24, 1968 ^[2]
Designated NHL	November 24, 1968 ^[3]

Descendants of Hemingway's original cats continue to live on the premises. In 2009, the cats became the subject of federal litigation after a museum visitor expressed concern about the cats' welfare. United States Department of Agriculture investigators visited the museum and subsequently ordered the museum to take measures to tag the cats for identification and to shelter them.^[4] The museum fought the regulations in court but lost their case in the court of appeals, which ruled that the cats "substantially affect" interstate commerce and thus are protected by the Animal Welfare Act of 1966.^[5] The house does not sell cats but does continue a selective breeding program for them.

It was in this house that Hemingway wrote some of his best work, including the short story classics "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber", his novel To Have And Have Not, and the non-fiction work Green Hills of Africa.

The house stands at an elevation of 16 feet (4.9 m) above sea level but is still the second-highest site on the island. It was originally built in 1851 by Asa Tift, a marine architect and salvage wrecker, in a French Colonial estate style,^[6] out of limestone quarried from the site. As testament to its construction and location, it survived many hurricanes, and the deep basement remained, and still remains, dry.^[7] Before Hurricane Irma struck the Florida Keys in September 2017, the entire population of the island chain were ordered to evacuate by the federal government, but the museum's curator, general manager and a team of Hemingway Home employees declined to leave the house or evacuate its cats. Several Hemingway Home employees stayed with the cats and the house. They all survived the storm intact.^[8]

The Hemingways had spent the previous three years living in Key West but had rented housing, the last being a two-story home at 1301 Whitehead Street.^{[9][10]} Pauline (the writer's second wife) found the Tift house for sale at a tax auction in 1931. Pauline's Uncle Gus bought it for her and Ernest, for \$8,000 cash, and presented it to them as a wedding gift.^[11]

Features

The house was one of the first on the island to be fitted with indoor plumbing and the first on the island to have an upstairs bathroom with running water, fed from a rain cistern on the roof.

Also notable are a built-in fireplace and the first swimming pool in Key West, which was the only pool within 100 miles (160 km) in the late 30s. In November 1936, in an interview with the *Key West Citizen*, Hemingway showed the reporter the location he had planned for a pool. It was Pauline Hemingway, though, who spent \$20,000 (equivalent in 2013 to \$330,000) to have the deep well-fed pool built for her husband while he was away as a Spanish Civil War correspondent in 1938. When Hemingway returned, he was unpleasantly surprised by the cost and exclaimed, "Well, you might as well have my last cent," before tossing a penny into the pool. This penny is embedded in concrete today near the pool.^[9]

In 1937, when Ernest was in Spain, Pauline hired Ernest's friend, driver, and handyman, Toby Bruce, to build the high brick wall that surrounds the house today.^[12]



Ernest Hemingway with sons and kittens at Finca Vigia, Cuba, ca. 1942 (JFK Library). The photo confirms son Patrick's memory of Hemingway's cats in Cuba.



Tourists visiting the home in 2019

Another of Hemingway's loves was boxing. He set up a ring in his yard and paid local fighters to box with him. He also refereed matches at Blue Heaven, then a saloon but now a restaurant, at 769 Thomas Street.

Hemingway converted a urinal obtained after a renovation at Sloppy Joe's bar into a water fountain in the yard, where it remains a prominent feature at the home, filled with water from the large Cuban jar and serving as one of many water sources for the grounds' cats.^[1] The grounds of the house are maintained as a garden, with many tropical plants installed after Hemingway moved to Cuba. In Hemingway's time, the grounds, like the island, were sparse and dry due to lack of water that only came later, with the Navy's installation of a water line from mainland.

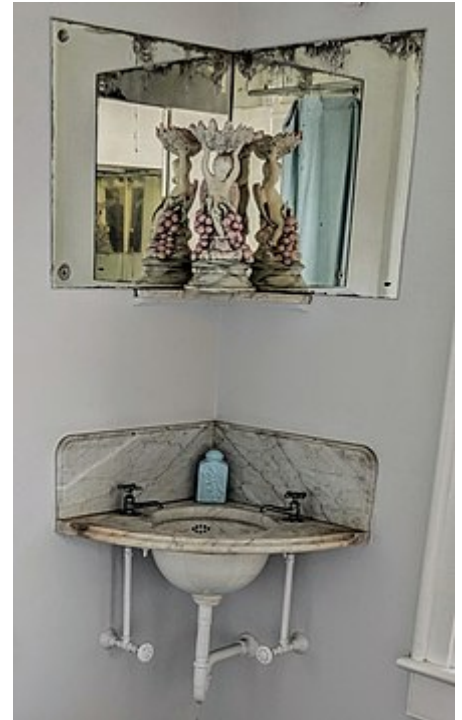
The house was originally purchased for \$8,000. After Hemingway's death in 1961, the house was sold by his widow, Mary, to Mrs. Bernice Dickson, the founder of the museum. A prominent feature of the dining room is a Murano glass chandelier. Upstairs, a book display shows books owned by Hemingway while he lived in Key West—including *Red Pete the Ruthless* by C. M. Bennett. Clearly visible is the inscription, "Given to Hemingway—1936," from Sister Ida, a nun at the local St. Joseph's convent.

His writer's studio in the second floor of a free-standing carriage house, and where he stayed briefly (in the 1950s) when visiting from his home in Cuba, was once connected by a second story walkway to the master bedroom. The walkway, shown in pictures from archives, has not been reconstructed.

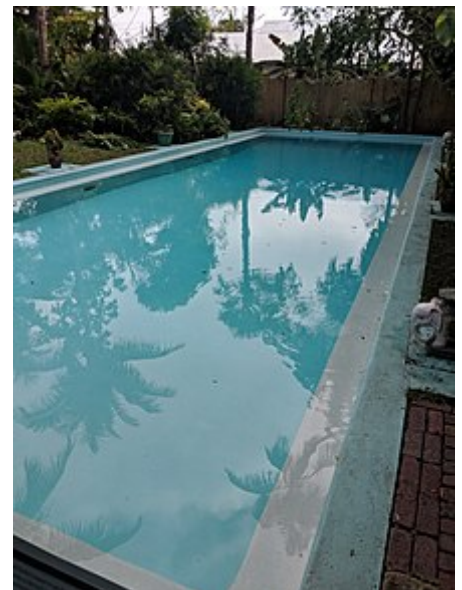
A garage on the property, with a caretaker's apartment on the second floor, was built to house Ernest's Buick automobile.

In 1988, the house was a filming location of the 16th *James Bond* movie *Licence to Kill*. In the scene, Bond resigns from the secret service and then flees through the garden. In protection of M, the fictional guards watch from the Key West Light across the street. Hemingway often remarked on how convenient it was to live close to a lighthouse, as it could often guide him home when drunk.^[13]

The house is also featured in the 2017 film *The Leisure Seeker* starring Helen Mirren and Donald Southerland.



Bathroom plumbing at the Hemingway house



Hemingway's pool in 2019

Gallery



Front of the house



A courtyard area



Hemingway's studio in 2019



Porch on the side including one of the dozens of cats



Garden



View from inside the house, showing wheelchair access



View from inside the house



Hemingway's writing desk



One of the many polydactyl cats that live on the property

See also

- Birthplace of Ernest Hemingway
- Ernest Hemingway Cottage, Walloon Lake, Michigan
- Ernest and Mary Hemingway House, Ketchum, Idaho

References

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12. Reynolds, Michael (1997). *Hemingway: The 1930s* (<https://archive.org/details/hemingway1930s0000reyn>). New York: W. W. Norton & Co. p. 268 (<https://archive.org/details/hemingway1930s0000reyn/page/268>). ISBN 0393343200. OCLC 35397885 (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/35397885>).
13. <https://humanresearch.xyz/hemingway-house-and-museum-from-licence-to-kill/>

External links

- [Official website](http://www.hemingwayhome.com/) (<http://www.hemingwayhome.com/>)
- Hemingway House Photo Gallery (<http://magicallydigital.com/hemingway-home/>)
- "Writings of Ernest Hemingway", broadcast from the Ernest Hemingway House (<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/169667-1>) from C-SPAN's *American Writers*
- Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) No. FL-179, "Tift-Hemingway House, 907 Whitehead Street, Key West, Monroe County, FL (<https://loc.gov/pictures/item/fl0149/>)", 12 photos, 7 measured drawings, 9 data pages, 1 photo caption page, supplemental material

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